

To: City Executive Board
Date: 17 December 2014
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present comments from the Scrutiny Committee on the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy.

Key decision? Yes

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Craig Simmons

Executive lead member: Councillor Susan Brown, Executive Member for Customer Services and Social Inclusion

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan 2014-2018 - Efficient, Effective Council

Recommendation:

That non-profit making organisations are clearly encouraged to contact the City Council for an early assessment of whether they may be entitled to discretionary reliefs.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee pre-scrutinised the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for non-domestic rates. The Committee would like to thank Tanya Bandekar, Service Manager for Revenues and Benefits, and Stephen North, Senior Revenues Officer, for attending the Committee to support its discussion.

Summary of the discussion

2. The Committee heard that it is a prudent time to review this policy because there have been a number of changes to reliefs over recent years. Since the report was published, further changes to retail reliefs were announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.
3. The Committee asked whether the City Council takes class action. Members were advised that officers will alert the Valuation Office to issues

such as car park closures, and would encourage Councillors to make them aware of similar localised issues.

4. The Committee heard that discretionary reliefs are considered on a case by case basis, taking the interests of local residents and Council Tax payers into account. The Panel felt that we could look to tighten up the policy where rate relief is discretionary. With this in mind, the Panel referred the report to the Local Economy Scrutiny Panel for further consideration.
5. The Committee commented that non-profit making organisations need to be better able to anticipate whether they will be entitled to reliefs. Officers advised that they would encourage such organisations to make contact with the team to discuss their circumstances. The Committee welcomed this approach and felt that this could be made clearer in the policy.

Recommendation - That non-profit making organisations are clearly encouraged to contact the City Council for an early assessment of whether they may be entitled to discretionary reliefs.

Further consideration

6. The Local Economy Scrutiny Panel will consider this policy further as part of a review of how City Council policies and services support the local economy.

Director and Board Member Comments

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List of background papers: None